



# The Great Ohio Valley Flood of 1913



Ohio and Indiana's Largest Weather Disaster



# Countries Largest Weather Disaster

## LOCAL WEATHER.

Rain or snow; Friday fair, with rising temperature; high northwest winds.

## CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER. LATEST EXTRA

SEVENTY-SECOND YEAR.

EIGHTEEN PAGES.

CLEVELAND, THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 27, 1913

PRICE IN GREATER CLEVELAND—ONE CENT.

NO. 86

# FATAL FIRES RAGE THROUGHOUT FLOODED DAYTON

## 500 MAY BE DEAD IN PIQUA---ZANESVILLE UNDER WATER---HUNDREDS DIE IN INDIANA

### RESERVOIR MENACES CITIES AS OHIO'S DEAD LIST SWELLS

**Great Lewistown Lake Threatens to Sweep  
Miami Valley—250,000 Homeless in State  
—150 Deaths in Columbus.**

COLUMBUS, O., March 26.—Floodswept Ohio, from Lake Erie to the Ohio river and from the Indians to the Pennsylvania state lines, tonight is dotted with wrecked cities and villages whose desolate thousands see no hope ahead. With the rain still descending, shivering in the cold, homeless and hungry, they hardly take heed of the dead strewn the wreckage or of the bodies being carried downstream.

The toll of death this second day of destruction all over the state still is mounting. It is useless even to attempt to say how many hundreds have lost their lives. The West Side of Columbus alone has added from 100 to 150 to the total.

Besides the capital city at least seven large towns stand in the lead as mourners for the greater number of dead. Those are Delaware, Hamilton and Zanesville and the four cities in the Miami valley, Sidney, Piqua, Troy and Miamisburg, which are threatened with annihilation should the immense Lewistown reservoir give way, which it momentarily threatens to do.

Reports early tonight that Zanesville had been wiped out proved untrue. Later messages told of great suffering there, and stated the city was submerged, but not destroyed.

The nation has been appealed to and will aid stricken Ohio. Gov. Cox today telegraphed the war department at Washington asking that 50,000 tents and 100,000 rations be made available for use and distribution by the Ohio National Guard. They will be furnished at once.

**Governor Estimates 250,000 Homeless.**

Gov. Cox estimates that more than 250,000 people have been



### BULLETINS

DAYTON, O., March 27—4 a. m.—The fire in the business section is still burning fiercely. The advance of the flames seems to have changed in general direction from northwest to straight west. Efforts to ascertain if buildings housing refugees have burned are unavailable. It is impossible to come within a mile of the blaze.

At 1:30 this morning state guardsmen shot and killed a man attempting to loot a residence on W. 5th-st.

LIMA, O., March 26.—That at least 500 people lost their lives in the flood at Piqua and that fifty were drowned at Troy was reported by C. C. Moore, telephone inspector of the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton railroad, who returned to this city tonight after viewing the situation in both cities. Moore said Piqua refugees had been without food for a day and a half.

COLUMBUS, O., March 26.—Operator Bell, who has been furnishing Gov.

### FLOOD'S DEATH LIST GROWS AS FLAMES ADD TO HORROR

**Fatalities Believed to Have Mounted Higher  
in Dayton by Burning of Refugee  
Filled Buildings.**

### ESCAPE FLOOD IN DAYTON

CHICAGO, March 26.—The first list of persons known to have survived the Dayton flood was received at the offices of the American Telephone & Telegraph Co. here tonight. The list includes persons marooned in the Y. M. C. A. building and Algonquin hotel. The names of others also in these buildings had not been ascertained.

In the Y. M. C. A. building—Hendricks.

In the Algonquin hotel—Edward Nahab, W. H. Eccles, Weichenburger, M. O. Southwick, F. E. Corbet, H. B. Gorresant, O. B. Parker, Edward F. Fox, Q. J. Roskoosh, Roy J. Chorrofox, M. J. Patterson, H. M. Clark and Kirk.

COLUMBUS, O., March 26.—Dayton's flood death list was increased tonight and today by five.

Latest estimates of the number of dead place the figures anywhere between 1,000 and 2,000.

Flames, fed by broken gas mains, have burned buildings to the water's edge and Dayton has had no means of fighting the fire.

That the fire had destroyed the Bechel hotel, where there were supposed to be more than 200 flood refugees, was the consensus of opinion of scores of watchers on the top of the National Cash Register building, nearly two miles from the scene of the flames.

**Can't Get Near Burning Buildings.**





*The floods of March 1913 wrought such great devastation as never before witnessed in America.*

EVERY STREAM, CREEK, AND RIVER IN OHIO AND MOST OF INDIANA FLOODED. Parts of Kentucky, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Vermont, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama also saw major if not record flooding.



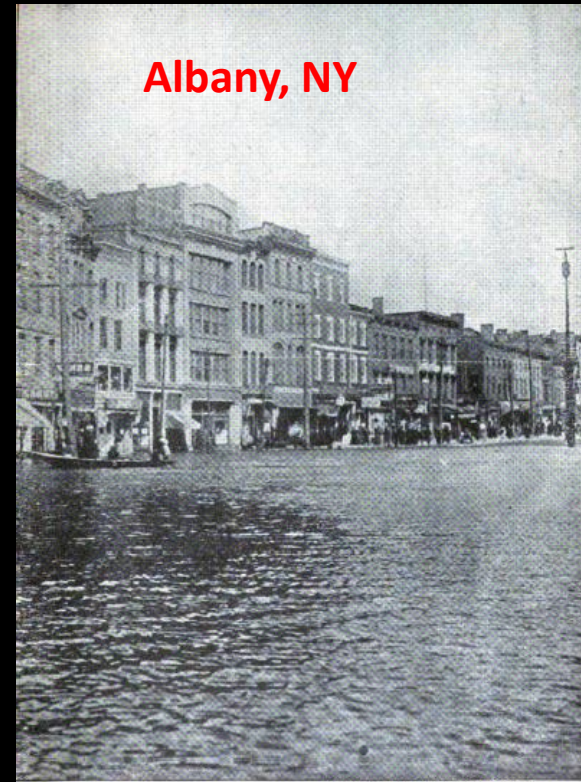
This is a view of Massillon, Ohio, looking east from Ceres Supply Co., Tremont Street. Photo courtesy of the Massillon Museum (Karl Spuhler Estate)



Columbus, OH



Albany, NY



THE FLOOD AT ALBANY, NEW YORK  
VIEW ON BROADWAY. THIS IS ONE OF THE BUSIEST  
THOROUGHFARES IN THE STATE'S CAPITAL CITY

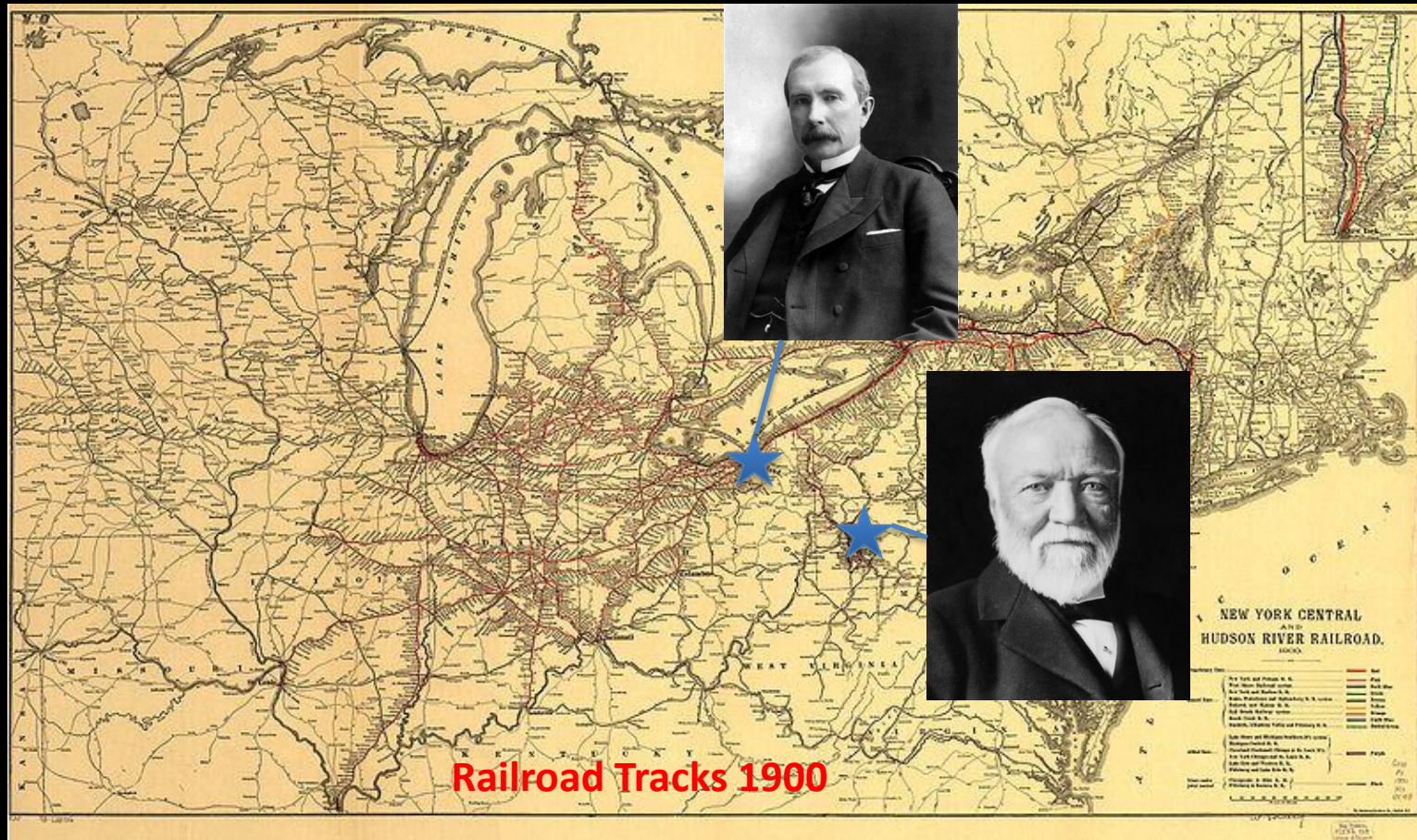
Indianapolis, IN



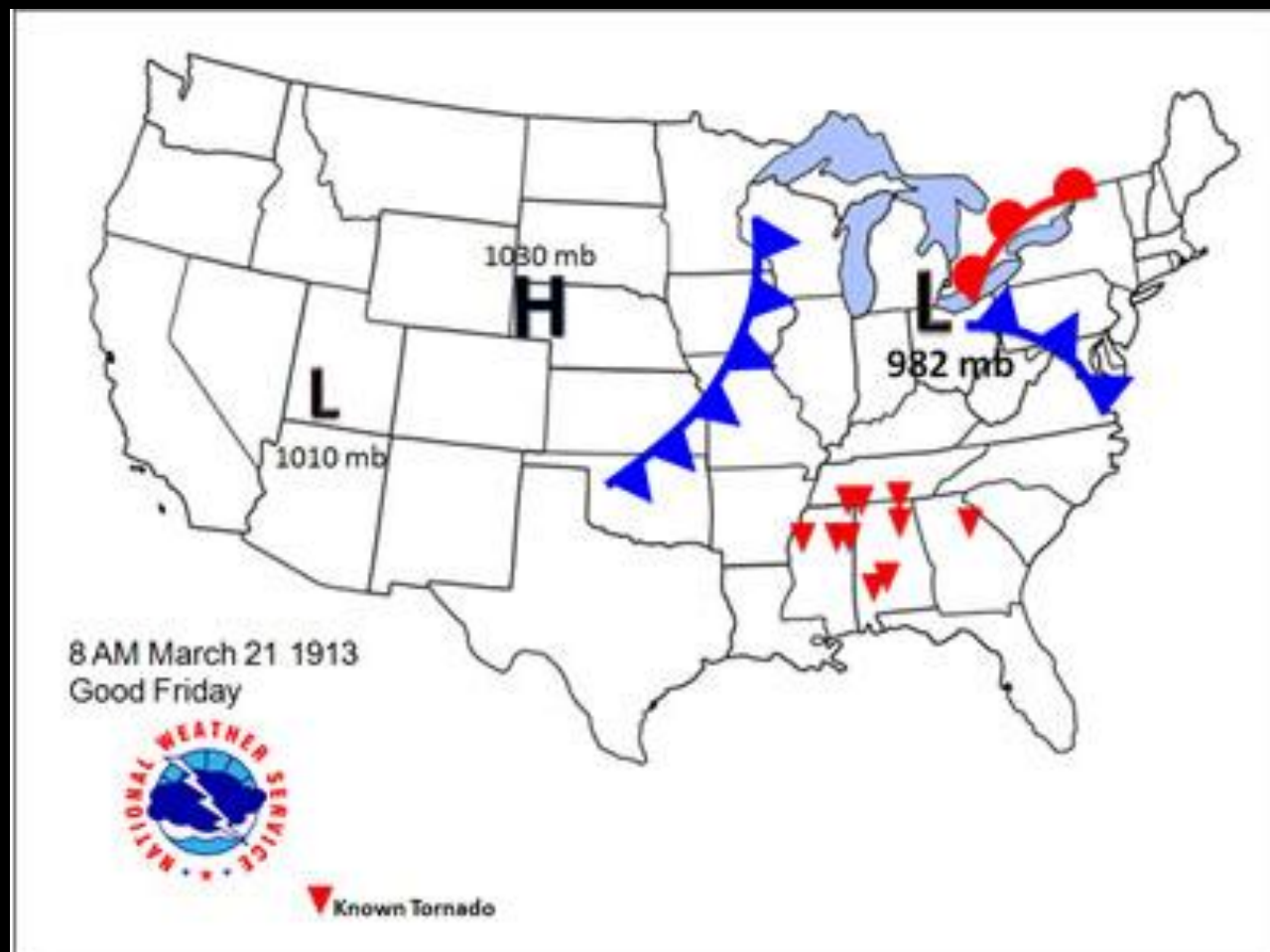
# State Capitals Inundated



# Prior to the Flood

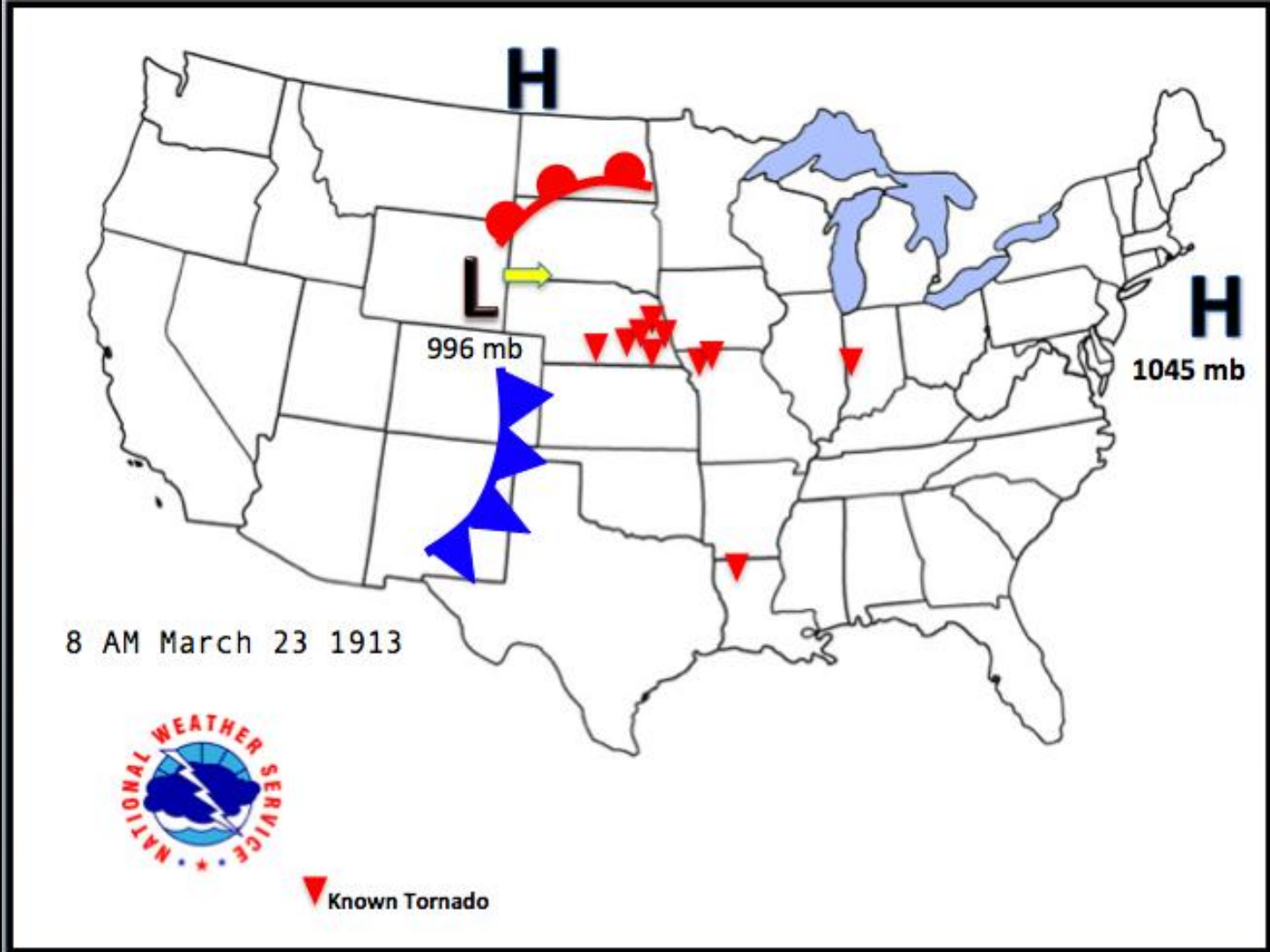


- At the turn of the 20th century the Ohio Valley was the largest producers of steel manufacturing, railroads, coal and natural gas
- Andrew Carnegie and JD Rockefeller's industry impacted by storm



A most unique event occurred on March 21<sup>st</sup> as hurricane force winds were observed for an extended duration at Detroit, Toledo, and Buffalo, with strong gales across the entire lakes region. Storm crippled phone and electrical lines across the Ohio Valley.

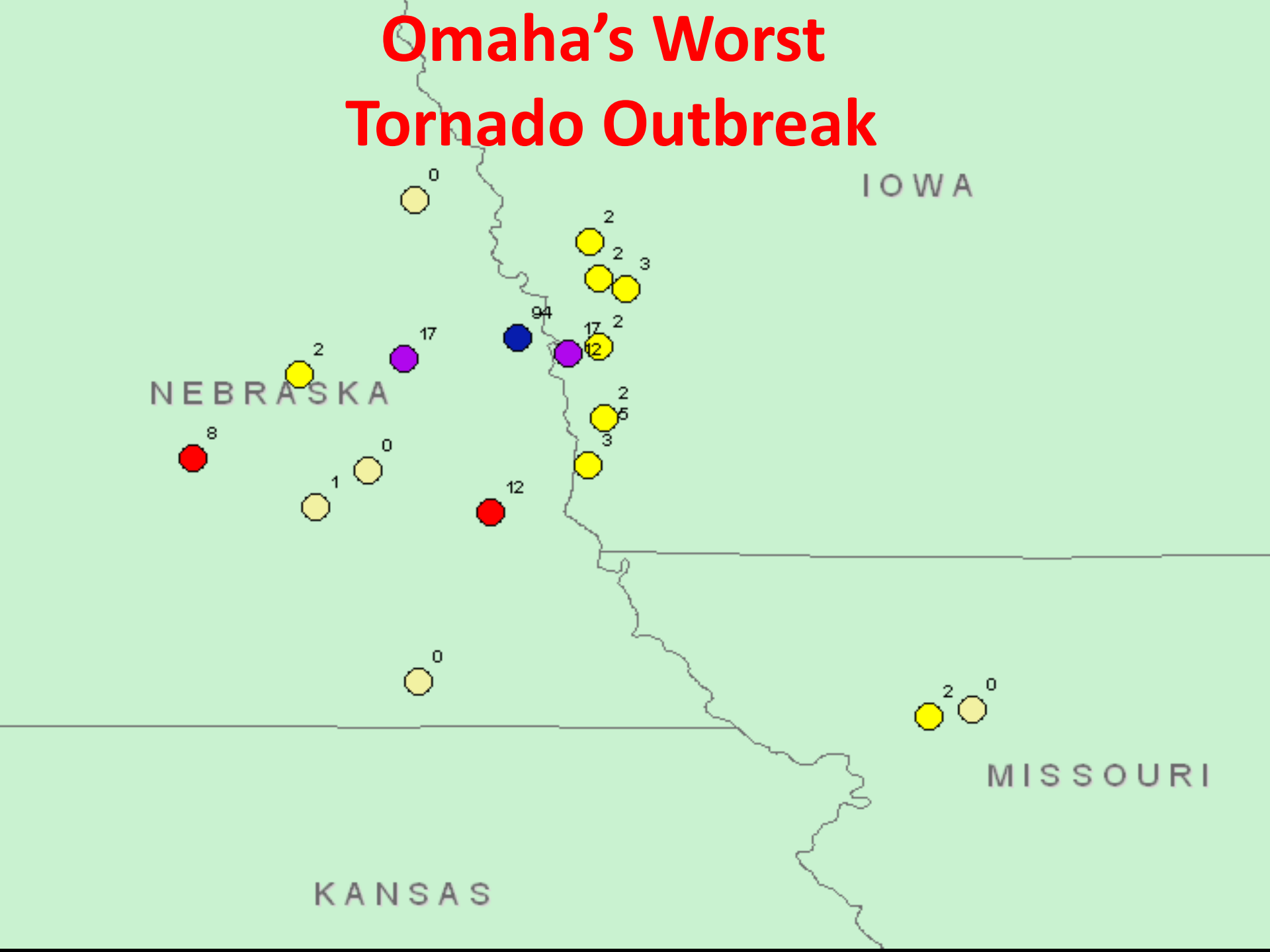
# Good Friday



By Sunday March 23<sup>rd</sup> another area of low pressure moved out of the Rockies. This storm system brought the worst dust storm to Kansas prior to the dustbowl years, severe thunderstorms to Missouri, and tornadic storms in the northern plains including the hardest hit Omaha, NB and Terra Haute, IN where 152 persons perished.



# Omaha's Worst Tornado Outbreak



Omaha, NB Tornado Outbreak  
Easter Sunday 1913



Photos Courtesy of the MARDOS Memorial Library ([www.MemorialLibrary.com](http://www.MemorialLibrary.com) housed at USGenNet.org)



# Terre Haute Tornado



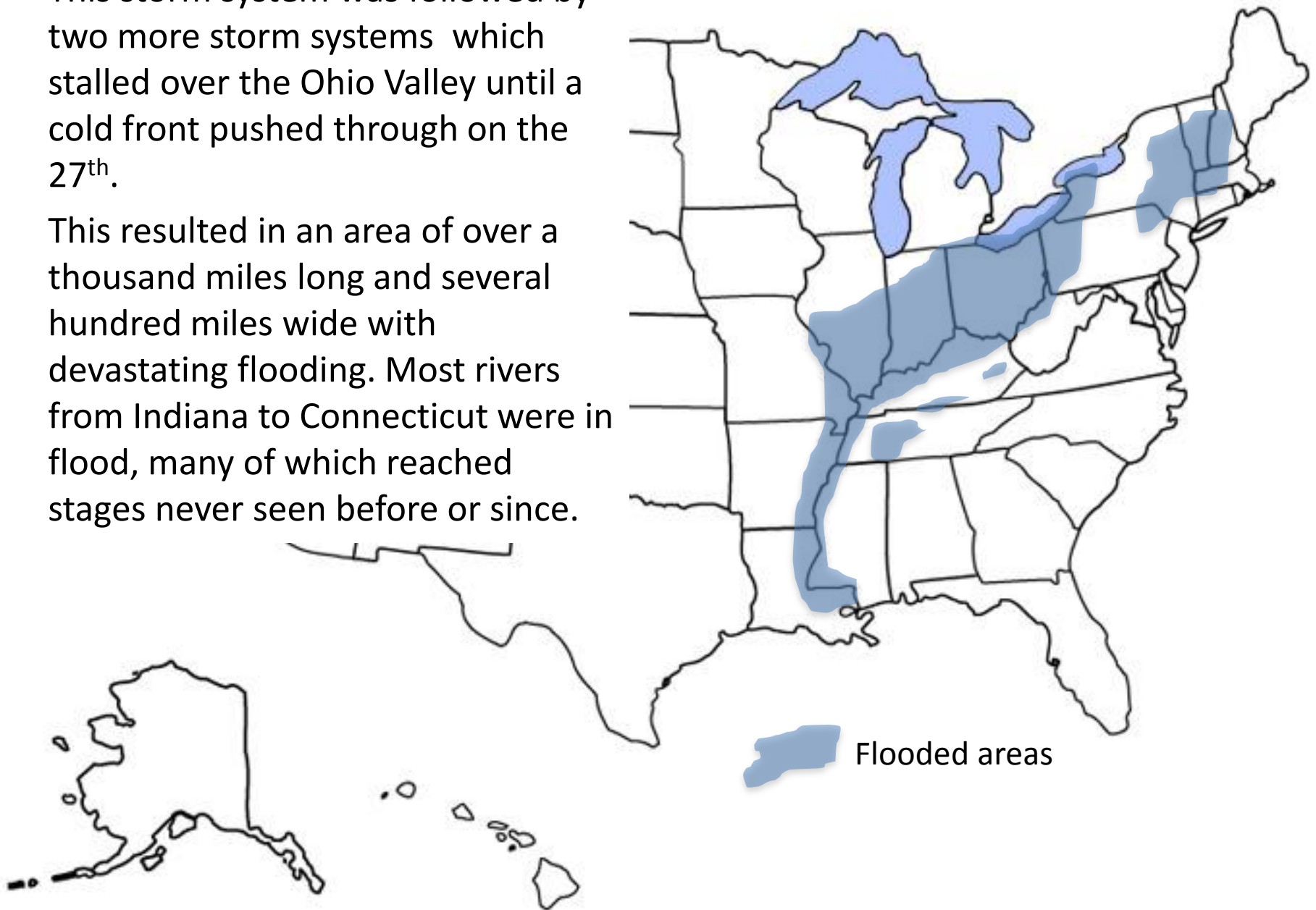
Leslie Whitton, NewPhone 869, 1641



Tornado Terre Haute Ind  
Mch 23. 1913

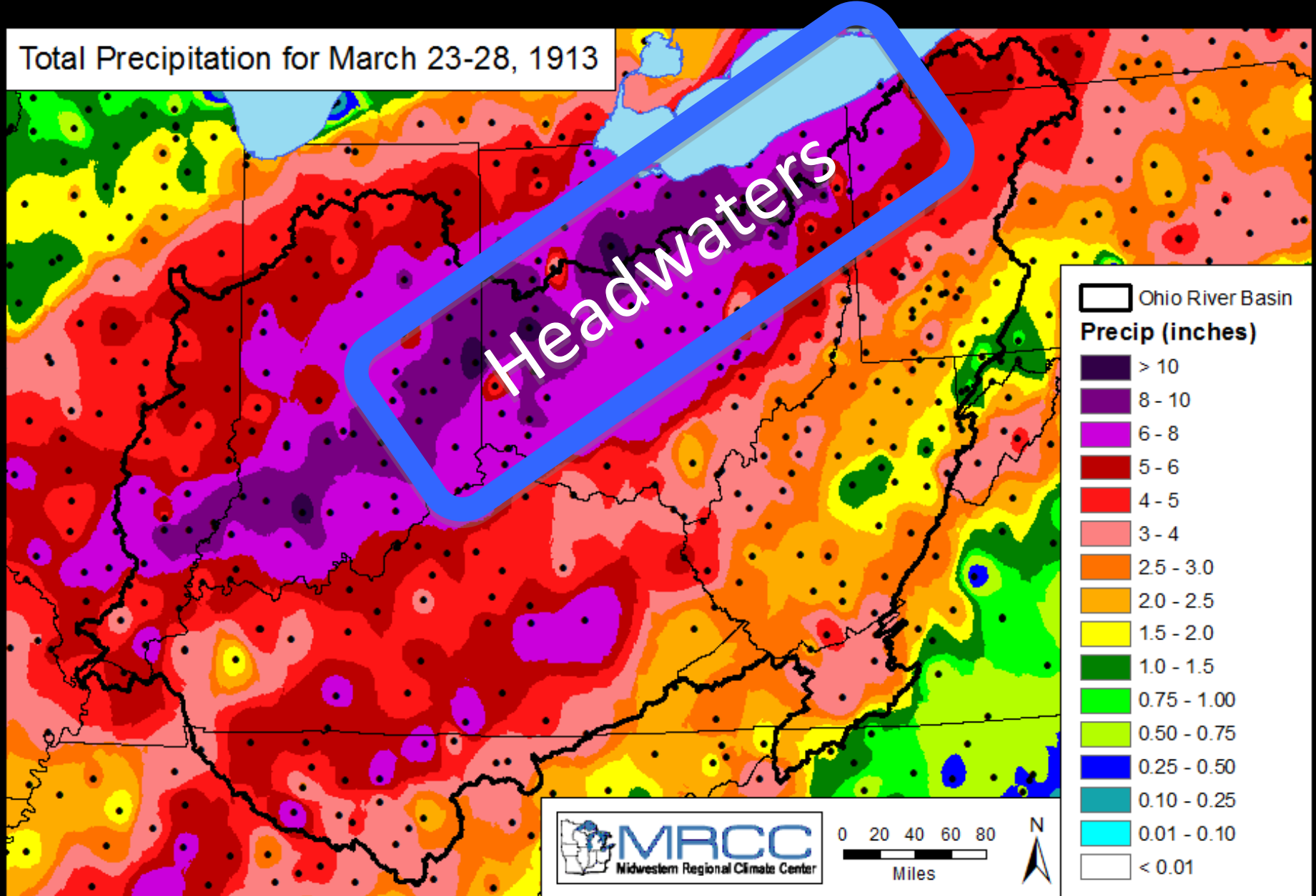
This storm system was followed by two more storm systems which stalled over the Ohio Valley until a cold front pushed through on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

This resulted in an area of over a thousand miles long and several hundred miles wide with devastating flooding. Most rivers from Indiana to Connecticut were in flood, many of which reached stages never seen before or since.





Total Precipitation for March 23-28, 1913



An average 6 inches, or 14 billion gallons of water had fallen over the Ohio Valley.



Bridge along the East Fork of the White River in Gosport, IN during the 1913 flood. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Unusually high water was reported as early as Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> over northeast Indiana and northwest Ohio including the towns of Fort Wayne, Elwood, Marion, Kokomo, Winchester, Huntington, Wabash in Indiana and Fremont, Findlay, West Liberty, Ottawa, and Toledo in Ohio. By late Monday Night, all of these river communities saw record floods.





Downtown Dayton, March 25 1913. Courtesy Wright State University Library.

# The Levees Break

By early Tuesday morning, the levees broke in Indianapolis, IN, Dayton, OH and Columbus, OH resulting in flood waters of depths reaching 15 to 18 feet. By that afternoon, all river communities in Ohio were flooded. By Tuesday Night the headwater rivers in Ohio and Indiana began to recede, but given the extreme stages reached many stayed flooded well into Thursday. In Terra Haute Indiana, a town recently ravaged with a tornado that resulted in 21 deaths, the river soon rose to an unprecedented stage.



PHOTOGRAPH, UNKNOWN & UNDERWOOD N. Y.  
**FLOOD SCENE ON THE HUDSON RIVER**  
 THE FLOOD AT WATERYLIET, NEW YORK, SHOWING BUILDINGS TORN FROM THEIR FOUNDATIONS FLOATING DOWN THE RIVER



PHOTOGRAPH, ST UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD N. Y.  
 61930 FC  
**THE FLOOD AT GLENS FALLS, NEW YORK**  
 THE RAGING FLOOD WATERS OF THE HUDSON SWEEP AWAY THE MASSIVE STEEL BRIDGE. DURING THE FLOOD THE RIVER AT THIS POINT ROSE TO AN UNPRECEDENTED HEIGHT



12764: Chestnut Street,  
 Sharon Flood, March 25th, 1913.

The heavy rains that gradually moved into New York and Pennsylvania, and then New England were not as significant as that seen in Indiana and Ohio, though the damage was still considerable. By far the worst damage in Pennsylvania was in the Shenango and Beaver Rivers in the northwest part of the state. In New York, many cities including Albany, Rochester, and Buffalo were flooded.



# The Ohio River

As the flood waters moved down the tributaries they reached the Ohio River. In Cincinnati the volume of waters coming out of the Great Miami River was so significant that it backed up the Ohio River



(Above) East end of Cincinnati during the March flood of 1913. Courtesy Library of Congress.

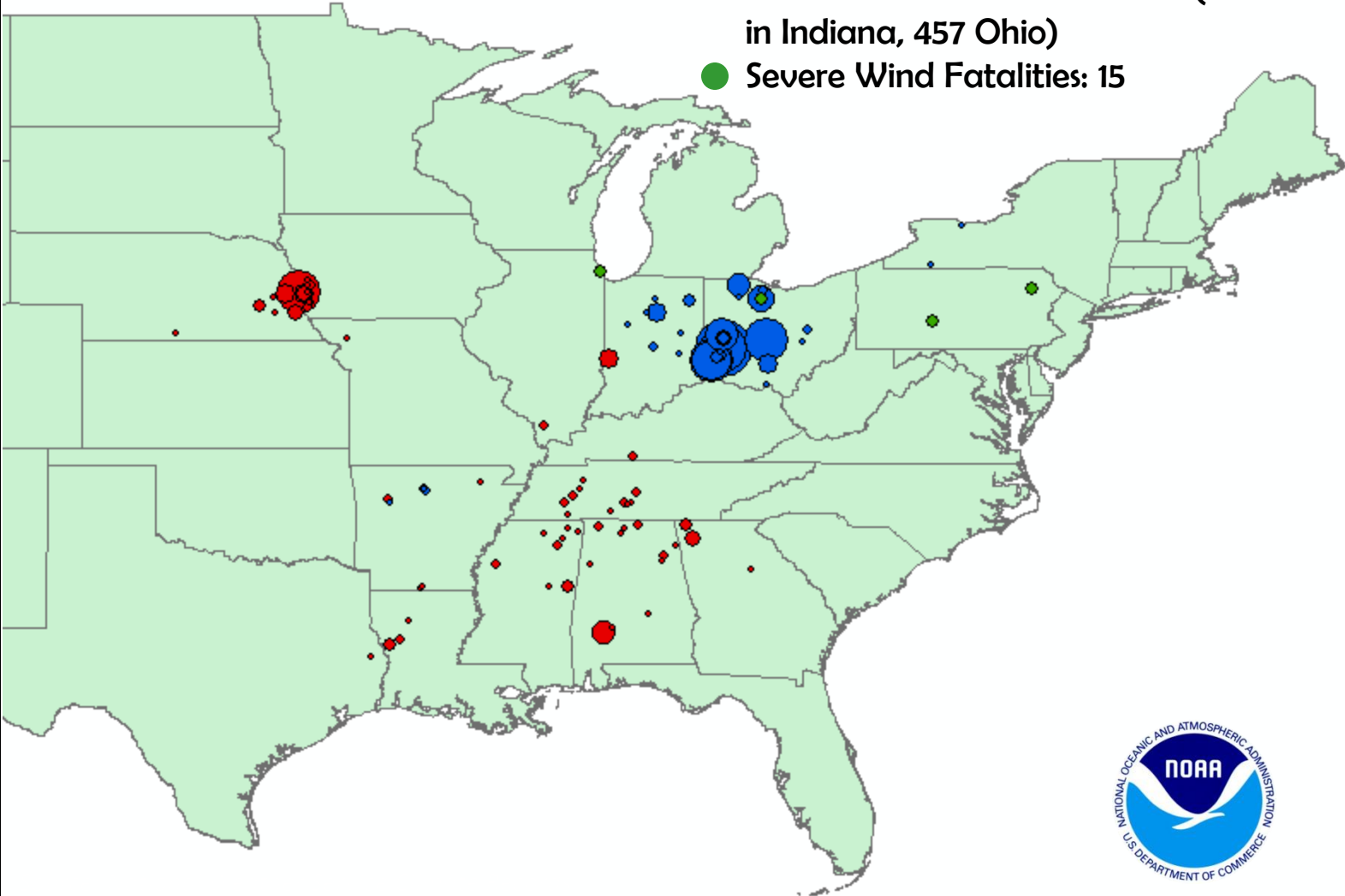
- ↳ Approximately 80 million acres saw severe flooding, 8 trillion gallons of water fell
- ↳ Over 500 fatalities in Ohio alone, over 100 in Indiana
- ↳ \$200,000,000-\$300,000,000 in damage, approximately \$4-6 billion today
- ↳ 250,000-300,000 displaced by the flood
- ↳ Remains the flood of record in many parts of OH/IN
- ↳ End of the canals
- ↳ Led to the first Conservancy District in the country

## Event Summary



# Weather Related Fatalities of March 1913

- Tornado Fatalities: around 350
- Flood Fatalities: around 600 (90 in Indiana, 457 Ohio)
- Severe Wind Fatalities: 15



# River Gauges where the 1913 remains flood of record

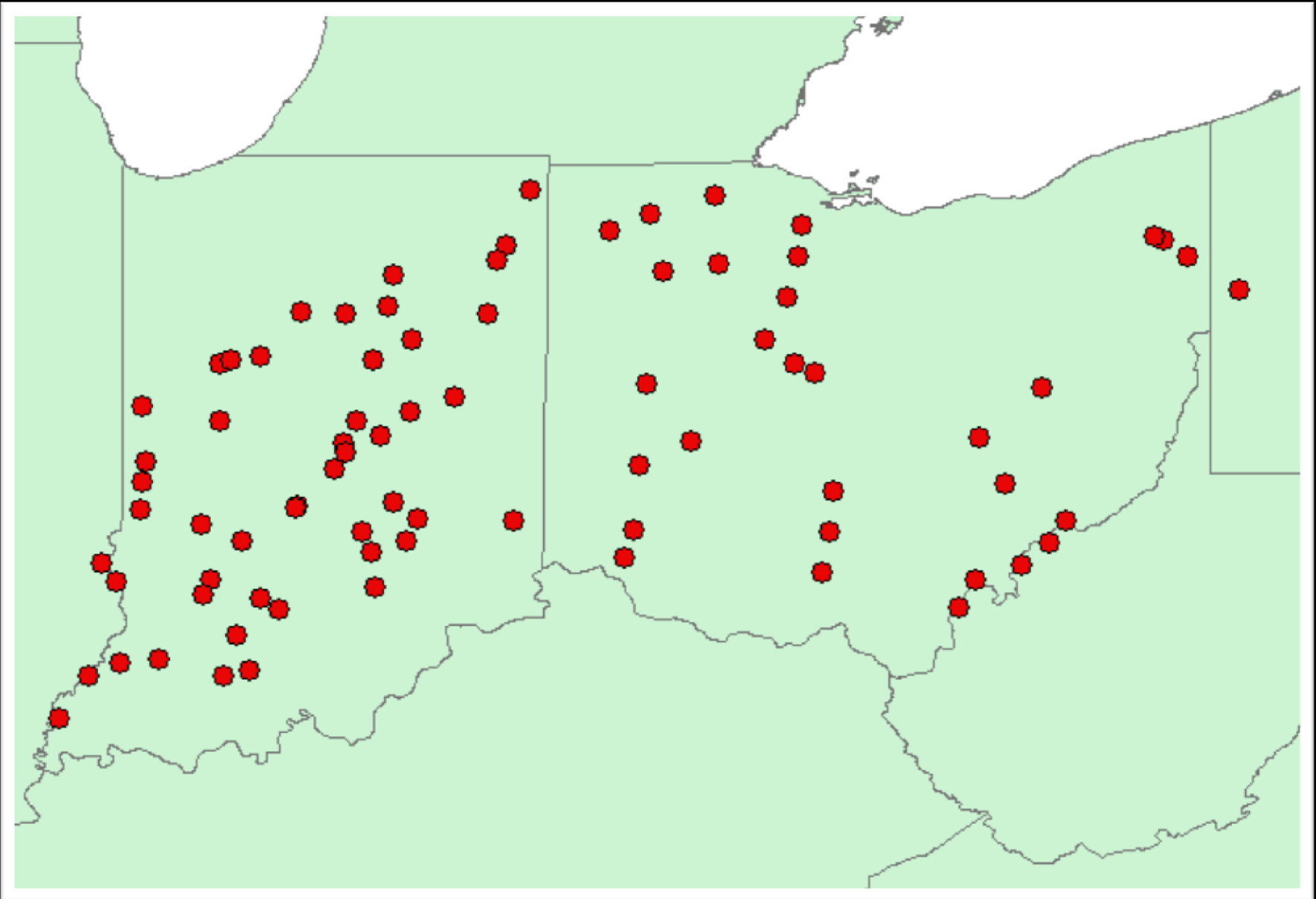
MARIETTA PH  
NEAR NORA, IN  
BELLEVILLE LOCK  
EDINBURGH, IN.  
CRAWFORDSVILLE, IN  
MILFORD  
BLUFFTON, IN  
COVINGTON, IN  
MASSILLON  
POINT PLEASANT  
CIRCLEVILLE  
NEAR FORTVILLE, IN  
NOBLESVILLE, IN.  
KINGS MILLS  
NEAR CENTERTON, IN  
LARUE  
MARION, IN  
LAFAYETTE, IN  
SHELBYVILLE, IN  
NEAR LAFAYETTE, IN  
NEAR FORT WAYNE, IN.

OTTAWA  
SPENCER, IN  
MUNCIE, IN  
NEAR CENTERTON, IN  
PETERSBURG, IN  
MONTEZUMA, IN  
SPRINGFIELD  
POMEROY  
JASPER, IN  
NORTH MANCHESTER, IN.  
MILLERSVILLE, IN  
TERRE HAUTE, IN  
HUTSONVILLE, IN  
UPPER SANDUSKY  
NEWCOMERSTOWN  
FORT WAYNE, IN.  
ROCKFORD, IN  
CLINTON, IN  
FINDLAY  
BEAVER FALLS

DEFIANCE  
NAPOLEON  
SHOALS, IN  
WAMPUM  
PIKETON  
LEAVITTSBURG  
WARREN  
WABASH, IN  
LOGANSPORT, IN  
WATERVILLE  
SIDNEY  
NEAR JEROME, IN  
PERU, IN  
TIFFIN  
PROSPECT  
FREMONT  
PARKERSBURG  
MIDDLETOWN  
ANDERSON, IN  
NEW HARMONY, IN.

HAMILTON  
DAYTON  
ZANESVILLE  
MC CONNELLSVILLE  
OLD PORTAGE  
BROOKVILLE  
BROOKVILLE, IN  
DELAWARE  
BEDFORD 4 SW, IN  
YOUNGSTOWN  
ST. PAUL, IN  
CHILLICOTHE  
HARTSVILLE, IN  
INDIANAPOLIS, IN  
WILLIAMS, IN





River Gauge Sites from where the flood of record remains the 1913 flood



For more information about the flood of 1913 please visit  
<http://mrcc.isws.illinois.edu/1913Flood/> or contact [sarah.jamison@noaa.gov](mailto:sarah.jamison@noaa.gov)